

Alfred University mechanical engineering students gear up for the big race

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ALFRED It's all downhill from here. Several groups of Alfred University mechanical engineering students are busy putting the finishing touches on soapbox derby-style cars that they'll race in the annual Pine Hill Derby, scheduled for Friday, April 26, as part of Hot Dog Day weekend festivities. The races begin at 3:30 p.m. If there is rain, they will be rescheduled for Saturday, May 4, at 3:30 p.m. The Pine Hill Derby has become a rite of spring at AU, as crowds that have numbered in the hundreds line winding Pine Hill Drive and cheer on the novice racers. This is the fifth year the races have been held, and the event continues to grow in popularity. According to Dr. Joseph Rosiczkowski, associate professor of mechanical engineering, the non-motorized cars are built by groups of mechanical engineering students. Most of the students are freshmen, who build the race cars as part of a required design project. "We use the competition as a means of working with the (younger) engineering students, getting them used to working together as a team," Rosiczkowski said, adding that other students may choose to stay involved in the Derby simply because they enjoy the race. "Some of the students can't wait to get behind the wheel." Students have been working on the car-building project for four to six weeks during the current semester. The cars are not motorized, nor are they powered by pedals. Racers one to a car rely solely on gravity to carry them through the course, which begins on Upper Pine Hill Drive and ends near Ade Dining Hall. The cars are "pre-tested" in the days just prior to the race to determine if they can be steered and braked properly. Drivers are required to go through an "agility course," steering around cones, before demonstrating their vehicle can stop effectively. Drivers who pass both tests will be permitted to race in the derby. Rosiczkowski said between 10 and 15 teams will participate in this year's race. The derby is held in two phases: one demonstrates braking and agility on a gentle grade; the other will be scored based on times in the downhill run. Teams that fail to meet minimum standards during the agility and braking portion of the event will not be allowed to participate in the downhill phase. Vehicles will reach speeds of between 20 and 25 miles per hour. For the drivers' and spectators' safety, bales of hay will be placed at curves to stop any cars that veer off the course. The Pine Hill Derby was called the "Gravity Race" in its first year, 1998. The following year, the student chapter of the Society of Automotive Engineers began overseeing the race. Rosiczkowski said large crowds have watched the race in past years. "It's Hot Dog Day (weekend), so there are a lot of students and alumni on campus," he said. "If the weather is nice, we'll get as many as 300 spectators." Would any of the mechanical engineering faculty members ever consider taking the wheel and taking a cruise down the winding street? Rosiczkowski chuckles at the notion. "I don't think any of us would have the courage to come down that hill." Hot Dog Day Weekend is more than just the Pine Hill Derby. There is a whole slate of activities planned for the two-day celebration. Starting Thursday, highlights include AU women's lacrosse team taking on Canisius College at 1 p.m. at Merrill Field. There will be and a poetry slam at 7 p.m. in the Alfred State College Pioneer Lounge. Friday features the Alfred State Track Invitational at 2 p.m. (the Alfred University track and field team will be participating.); "Bring the City to Alfred," a panel discussion on Boston, at 3 p.m. in the Powell Campus Center Knight Club; an ice cream bash at 6 p.m. in the Alfred Fire Hall; a showing of the film "The Royal Tenenbaums" in Nevins Theater at 8 p.m.; and a lip sync contest at 9 p.m. in the Knight Club. Also on Friday, the Student Activities Board presents comedian Mark Anthony at 10 p.m. in the Knight Club; Late Night in McLane, starting at 10 p.m. at the McLane Center; and the Caribbean Students Associations-sponsored Beach Party from midnight Friday to 6 a.m. Saturday in Davis Gym, with tickets \$5 at the door (or \$3 in advance by calling 607-587-2771 or 607-871-3415.) The festivities continue Saturday with the AU Peer Educators-sponsored second annual Hot Dog Day 5K Run-Walk. Entry fee is \$7 for the general public and \$5 for AU students, with benefits going to the Hot Dog Day fund. Specially designed T-shirts are guaranteed to everyone who registers in advance. Registration begins at 9 a.m. at the bandstand on Main Street and the run and walk will begin at 10 a.m., also at the bandstand. Awards will be presented after all participants return. The course will take participants 3.1 miles around the perimeter of the campus and town. To register via email, send name, address, age, T-shirt size, run/walk choice, and student or general-entry status to georgejl@alfred.edu. The traditional Hot Dog Day Parade begins at noon Saturday on Main Street. Events scheduled from noon to 5 p.m. Saturday include the annual carnival on the bandstand lawn, rides in the bandstand area, an arts and crafts fair at Carnegie Hall, and live music at the bandstand. At noon is the Lions Club chicken barbecue at the fire hall, followed by a hot dog eating contest at 12:30 p.m. Saturday also features the Mud Olympics at 1 p.m. at Tucker Field; a softball doubleheader between AU and Hartwick beginning at 1 p.m. at Hornell High School; a concert by the AU Symphony at 8 p.m. in Holmes Auditorium; Late Night in McLane, starting at 10 p.m.; and a Student Activities

Board-sponsored band, "The D Side," performing at 10 p.m. in the Knight Club.